DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 879 CS 504 788

AUTHOR Dallinger, Judith M.; Prince, Naomi
TITLE Teasing: Goals and Responses.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (70th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; *Communication Research; Higher Education; Interaction; Interaction Process Analysis; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Teasing

ABSTRACT

Three studies investigated the purposes of teasing and the reaction to it. The first study asked 26 college students to describe one instance when they were teased and one when they teased someone else. In addition, they were asked to explain why the teasing had occurred and why they categorized it as teasing. The second study, involving 24 students, focused specifically on the purposes and responses in a teasing episode, while the third, a survey of more than 250 students, examined how often individuals experienced each of the purposes and responses to teasing found in the initial studies. Results indicated the following: (1) teasing occurs primarily among friends and family members, (2) individuals attribute more positive than negative motives for teasers, (3) most responses to teasing are positive emotions, and (4) teasing is a daily communication activity. (Tables of findings and items from the questionnaire are appended.) (FL)

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TEASING: GOALS AND RESPONSES

Judith M. Dallinger

and

Naomi Prince

Communication Arts and Sciences
Western Illinois University
Macomb, Illinois 61455
(309) 298-1673

Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, Chicago, 1984.

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ABSTRACT

Teasing is an ambigous form of communication that has only recently received attention in professional literature. This paper reports the results of three exploratory sutdies investigating the goals and responses of conversational teasing episodes. Results indicate that 1) teasing occurs primarily between friends and family members, 2) people attribute more positive than negative motives to teasers, 3) most responses to teasing are positive emotions and 4) teasing is a daily communication activity. Future research should investigate the dimensions which distinguish teasing from other forms of communication acts.

TEASING: GOALS AND RESPONSES

Teasing is a communication strategy which is intiated for a variety of reasons and responded to in different ways. Teasing is a common communication event and as such, has generated some advice on the pragmatics of its accomplishment (Jabin, 1983). Unfortunately though, little attention has been given to teasing in professional literature. Currently authors of only two articles have distinguished teasing from a more commonly studied form of communication: joking. Each of these approaches to it have used analysis of conversational structure. Although both studies have based their results on examples of teasing from diverse conversational settings, neither have analyzed a sufficient number of examples to completely describe the full range of teasing episodes.

Beach and Dunning (1982) describe teasing as one of five speech acts possessing a "pre" status. They describe teasing as a presequence to extend a conversation with another person. Two different types of teases are the set-up and the disclaimer. The first is described as a communication game which occurs when the initiator intentionally manipulates the conversation by "baiting" recipients with partial information and then proceeds to withhold or postpone information. Thus, the listener must play the game in order to get the full message. The second type is a set up to gain the attention of the respondant and then to build his/her curiosity regarding the future direction of the conversation by using the turn-taking sequence. For each, the authors provide examples of only one successful tease and one in which the respondant chooses not to play the game.

Alberts and Hopper (1983) analyzed fifteen teasing episodes. Based on transcripts of those examples, they offer six propositions that describe how

a teasing interaction is initiated and how people situationally define it. The fifteen teasing episodes were derived from a variety of settings. Ten were collected in organizational-work related settings and three were extrapolated from popular literature. From the examples, the authors developed six propositions about how teasing operates in conversation.

Although both studies used examples of teasing from diverse conversational settings, they were concerned primarily with exploring the conversational structure of teasing. Other aspects of teasing deserve attention, and findings in those areas may indicate further support for these structural propositions. In order to extend out cummulative knowledge of teasing, the present authors did a series of studies. Investigations were made into the purposes and frequency of teasing and the reactions to it. This paper will first describe those studies and their results, and then will discuss their implications.

METHOD

This study is primarily concerned with the purposes and responses of teasing and how often people use teasing to communicate to others. It is exploratory in nature(and thus has been modeled after Hample's (1980) lying study). The first two studies relied on open-ended questions and provided the basis for the third study which used a structured closed-ended questionnaire.

OPEN-ENDED STUDIES

Two studies are described in this section. The first, asked each subject to describe two instances when s/he was teased by another and/or when s/he teased someone else. Additionally, they were asked to explain why teasing occurred and why the episode could be categorized as teasing. Fifty instances of teasing were generated by twenty six people. The second study focused specifically on the goals

and responses in a teasing episode. Approximately half of the subjects were asked to describe an instance in which they teased someone else and half were asked to describe an episode when they were teased by another. (n=24, 23 respectively). Additionally they were asked to describe any additional purposes and responses to teasing that they could think of. All examples generated were content analyzed (according to target, purpose and response) independently by each author. Inter-rater reliabilities were .75 across all categories. Since results from these studies were similar, their results will be discussed collectively. Findings are discussed in three areas: targets, purposes and responses.

Targets In the initial study, 39 out of 50 respsondants (78%) teased people who were close to them: roommates, boyfriends/girlfriends, friends, and family members. Eight responses represented a significant departure from the general mix of teasing examples. Three of these were categorized as past childhood memories of teasing, three were considered to be sexual teases, and two instances were not classifyable. Although childhood and sexual teases do occur, our sample indicates that these categories are not generally thought of first by participants of teasing episodes. Because the eight examples departed a great deal from the majority, they were not included in subsequent analyses. All of the examples of teasing provided were done intentionally.

In the second study, of the 23 examples provided by the initiators of teasing, 22 fell into the friend/family category of targets. One response was thrown out because it fell into the sexual tease category. Similarly, one of the 24 examples generated by people who were teased by others was thrown out because it fell into the childhood tease category. Thus, in the descriptive studies, subjects responses characterized teasing as an interpersonal communication behavior which occurs primarily between friends and family members.

Purposes Respondants' teasing episodes were content analyzed according to the purpose or goal of the teaser. Both studies had similar results so the following discussion will group these findings together. Three general purposes for teasing were reported by a number of respondants and two additional reasons were mentioned by only one or two subjects. The five purposes were: fun/affection, hurt/embarrassed, compliance gaining, jealousy, and revenge. Results from both studies are included in Table 1.

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In the studies, approximately 60% of the examples elicited fell into the fun/affection category. Within these types of teases, there were generally two aspects to the tease. First, the initiator of the tease tried to cheer up the repondant or make him/her smile. However, in doing so, the teaser usually focused on an attribute that the teasee was sensitive about and which had a somewhat negative punch to it. Two examples from the data pool illustrate this double message.

> "I teased someone about being short. My friend is about 5'5" and I told her to 'grow up.' She is two years older than I am, and very mature. She thought that it was really funny and took it in stride."

> "I was (somewhat unsuccessfully) trying to grow a mustache. A friend approached me acting like he was looking through binoculars and said 'Oh, now I see it'."

The negative aspect was mitigated by the friendly relationship between the interactants, so that the friendly factor was seen by the teaser as his/her primary purpose. The negative aspect in the fun/affection examples of teasing was more apparant in the second study than in the first beacuse the method used to solicit teasing episodes asked respondants to specify purposes more clearly.

The second purpose commonly mentioned was the intention to hurt or embarrass the teasee. About 10% of the examples fell into this category. The following

example illustrates this purpose.

> "My girl friend has a crush on a certain boy. She gets angry when I tell people, so the other day in front of her I asked a girl that knows her crush to set them up and I made a big deal out of it."

Although the intentions of the teasers were to hurt or embarrass the other person, the degree to which this happened cannot be positively ascertained by the data from this study.

The third purpose was compliance gaining in which the initiator used teasing to attempt to change the behavior of another person. Approximately 20% of the episodes represented the use of this strategy to alter someone's behavior. The following example illustrates the compliance gaining goal.

> "My boyfriend is always teasing me about my chuncky (fat) legs. Whenever I wear a dress he always tells me I look good but then he will make a comment about my 'cute fat" legs so I'll exercise with him."

When the responses to compliance gaining teases were analyzed, they tended to show emotional (e.g., happy, sad) outcomes rather than behavior change. Thus teasing may not be an effective compliance gaining strategy.

Only two examples indicated that revenge was the reason for teasing, and one episode occured because of the teaser's jealousy. This purpose occurred in a situation where the two people involved were of the opposite sex. These purposes may have surfaced more often if the respondants were asked to provide more incidents.

Respondants in the second study were asked to list any additional reasons that someone might initiate teasing. Purposes suggested were: to avoid serious conversation, to give a subtle hint to someone, and to gain the attention of the respondant or get a reaction from them.

In the overall analysis of the two open-ended studies, positive, rather than negative or manipulative, goals were attributed to teasing incidents, both by

teasers and teasees.

Responses The second purpose for this investigation was to determine what various reactions result from teasing episodes. Three major types of reactions were isolated. These were: positive reactions, anger/embarrassment/hurt, and multiple outcomes. Results are included in Table 2.

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Approximately 40% of the subjects described their reactions to teasing as positive, happy experiences. An example of a positive outcome follows.

> "My roommate talks in her sleep really bad. One night she got up and was walking around. The next day we were in the union and I began giving her a hard time. She just laughed along because it wasn't that embarrassing."

In both of the open-ended studies, the initiators of the tease attributed positive outcomes more often than did the teasees. Perhaps this indicates that successful teasing demands more than good intentions. Teasers may need such skills as accurate timing, precise evaluation of the respondant (in terms of his/her ability to play the teasing game), and cognitive flexibility (the ability to shift to another trend of thought) in order to initiate a tease that elicits a positive response from the teasee.

The second category included a wide range of negative responses. It is labeled angry/embarrassed/hurt and approximately 30% of examples fell into it. Generally, hurt was cited more frequently than the remaining two and then it was more frequently mentioned by respondants to teasing than by teasers. An example serves to illustrate this purpose.

> "In the living room of my house between my roommates we all sit around and blurt out whatever we want to say. Sometimes we get wierd and start telling sick jokes and mine was a little sicker that anyone elses so consequently I was teased for it. I felt somewhat embarrassed and refrained from telling my open feelings."

The third category was multiple reactions. Specifically, two categories existed that exemplified two reactions from the respondant. Those two were: unhappy but hiding it, initially angry, then getting over it. An example which illustrates a multiple response follows.

> "I teased my girlfriend in my car because I had a special way of making my horn work. So I would touch different knobs in the car and honk the horn. She didn't know how it worked and when she touched the knobs, the horn wouldn't work. She was fooled for a long time and I was laughing, and she got frustrated, then mad, and then when she understood, she laughed.

Multiple responses were described more often by respondants than by initiators of teasing. Perhaps, initiators of teasing are not sensitive to the entire reaction felt by the target of their tease.

Finally, some responses to teasing episodes were simply for the teasee to initiate a "teaseback". In this category, subjects simply indicated their "teaseback" behavior but failed to describe exactly how they accomplished it.

Teasers most often attributed a positive response to the target of their tease. However, teasees were not so likely to claim that they felt only positive emotions following a tease.

Goal/Response Pairs The final anlysis made of the open-ended results was to determine how often positive purposes resulted in positive outcomes, and so forth. Table 3 includes results of this analysis.

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To categorize episodes for this analysis, goals were coded as being positive if the data contained descriptions of teasing such as happy, fun or for affection. A negatively coded goal indicated that subjects used descriptive words such as angry, hurt or embarrassed. Teasebacks were coded as positive. The multiple

reaction category included examples which contained descriptions of more than one response.

The most common category was the teasing episode in which a positive goal elicited a positive response. Approximately 50% of the coded data fell into this category. All negative intentions resulted in negative responses. Not all positive goals resulted in positive responses though. In some cases positive purposes resulted in negative responses and in a few cases, positive goals resulted in multiple responses.

Summary It appears that teasing is a communication act that occurs most frequently between family members and friends. The goals most often cited were primarily of a fun/affection nature, although there was no way that the degree to which that was the only purpose in those episodes could be measured. Responses to teasing were also most frequently described as positive outcomes, although this occured more often in teasers examples that in those supplied by teasees. The majority of the teasing examples obtained in the open-ended studies were coded in the positive goals resulting in positive outcomes category. Interestingly, the negative intentional teases were successful in eliciting negative responses in every instance.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Several questions concerning teasing were not answered in the initial studies. Thus a closed-ended questionnaire was created to investigate how often individuals experience each of the purposes and responses to teasing that were extracted from the initial studies.

The questionnaire contained 35 questions: 13 concerning the purposes of teasing, 10 questions about responses, and a few additional follow-up questions. The questionnaire contained Likert-type items ranging from 1-7 for most questions, and 1-5 for others. 274 subjects from the mass lecture sections of the basic

public speaking course completed the questionnaire.

The frequency of use of four goals in teasing were assessed . Results are included in Table 4. The categories include: fun/affection, negative, compliance gaining and avoidance of serious conversation. Questions are included in Figure

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1 and will be refered to in the text by question number.

The fun/affection category (questions 1 and 2) was indicated as being used most often in teasing. 90% or more of the subjects responded that they teased others for fun or affection. Additionally, correlations between items which essentially assessed the same purpose for teasing were computed. The correlation between the two items for the fun/affection goal was .26 ($p = .001$).

Approximately 80% of the respondants denied using teases to hurt or ridicule people. The correlation between items (3 and 4) was .68 which was significant ($p=.001$).

The subjects also denied the use of teases to gain compliance (items 5 and 6) more often than not. Apparantly teasing is not frequently used for compliance although some people do attempt to use it that way. The correlations between the compliance gaining items was .63 ($p=.001$).

The fourth category of purposes for teasing was to avoid serious communication. 30% of the subjects stated they used teasing to "lighten up" the conversation and 50% denied the use of teasing for that purpose. The correlation between items 7 and 8 was .53 ($p=.001$). It appears that some people tend to use teasing for this end, but it is not the first purpose that people think of when asked to describe teasing behavior.

Thus, in describing the purposes of their teasing, people tend to attribute

mostly positive motives to their bevaviors.

A second section of the questionnaire was used to quantify self reports of subjects' reactions to teasing. Four responses to teasing categories were included. Results are included in Table 5.

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Items 16 and 17 were questions asking respondants how often they reacted positively to being teased (i.e., laughed or felt colser to the teaser). 50% of the people responded that they "often" laughed as a response to teasing and 35% of the people responded that they felt closer to the teaser. These two items correlated at .30 (p=.001).

Five different types of negative outcomes were investigated included: hurt, frustrated, embarrassed, defensive, and angry. When examined all together, approximately 10% of the subjects indicated they often responded to teasing with these negative outcomes. Each of the five negative responses were significantly bivariately correlated with all others (items 11 through 15).

One item asked respondants if they changed their behavior when they were teased about it. Only 13% said "often or always" and 43% said "seldom or never."

The last category of responses to teasing was multiple outcomes. One item asked how often subjects pretend they aren't upset about a tease when really they are. In this item, 28% said "often or always." A second item asked how often people initially were angry about the tease, but later got over it. Here, only 15% said "often or always."

People generally report that they respond well to teasing. However, within this group of subjects, more people admitted to having negative responses toward

being teased than admitted to negative motive in initiating teasing toward others.

In addition to assessing the frequency of purposes and reponses in teasing, two items asked subjects how often they use teasing in conversation. These included how often respondants tease others and how often they are teased. Four choices were provided: several times per day, once a day, several times a week and once a week or less. Responses were virtually the same to both of these questions. That is, 40% indicated that teasing occured several times a day, 16% said once a day, 31% answered several times a week and only 13% of the people said once a week or less. The correlation between these items was .75 ($p=.001$) indicating that, in large part, people who tease others are also teased in return. This conclusion is further supported by responses to two questions concerning the reciprocal nature of teasing (items 9 and 10). Approximately 75% of the people agreed that they responded to teases received by teasebacks. Responses for these items are included in Table 4.

Finally, two incidental questions resulted in interesting findings. Respondants were asked how frequently they knew what the teasee's response would be. 70% claimed that they could predict what the outcome on the part of the teasee would be. Additionally, subjects were asked if they had a good sense of humor. Not suprisingly, 96% agreed that they did.

DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the combined results of the present studies and how they relate to previous research done in the area of conversational teasing.

Our first conclusion is that most people characterize themselves as good teasers. They frequently describe themselves as being friendly people whose teases should be interpreted as prefectly harmless. They often felt that the

respondants should perceive the accurate motive behind the tease. However, in appriximately 35% of the cases, the teaser failed to elicit the predicted response. The majority of respondants did not react with a tease-back, which might be expected, but simply with a passive reaction such as a laugh, smile or a frown.

Teasing for positive outcomes seems to demand more skill than it counterpart. In 35% of the case examples, the teaser failed to elicit the predicted response. Teasing for negative reasons, however, was successful in evoking a negative response 100% of the time.

The second finding was that most of the people who were teased thought of themselves as "good responders." They often responded to teases by laughing with the teaser, and feeling closer to him/her. Although some were hurt by being teased, many often realized that the incident was only intended for fun so they attempted not to take it personally. Nearly all of the respondants described themselves as having a good sense of humor, probably because of the importance that society places on maintaining one (Buckalew and Coffield, 1978). It is likely that social desirability is reponsible, to some extent, for results to questionnaire items. Thus its not suprising to find many positive self descriptions in relation to purposes and reponses in teasing. Future research is needed to assess the magnitude of contamination due to social desirability.

The third result of this study relates to compliance gaining behavior achieved through teasing. Compliance gaining strategies are generally defined as " a form of symbolic behavior designed to shape or regulate the behavior of others" (Schenck-Hamlin, et. al., 1982, p. 92). Most of the compliance gaining examples of teasing were attempts to get the target to comform to 1) normal eating habits, 2) normal sleeping habits, and 3) conformity to peer groups (e.g., smoking). The compliance gaining tease was usually made in the form of a hint

to the target. Schenck-Hamlin, et. al. describe hinting as a form of tacitly understood behavior in which "elements of the situational context are revealed; providing the target with clues as to what response is appropriate (Schenck-Hamlin 1982, p. 96). Since teasing is an indirect speech act that functions on two levels (Alberts and Hopper, 1983) there are generally two goals involved. One is for fun/affection and the underlying goal, in a compliance gaining tease, would be to hint that the teasee should change his/her behavior. If the respondant's perceive the affection goal as the more predominant one, then the effectiveness of the compliance gaining strategy is diminished. Thus, in order for teasing to be effective in compliance gaining, the target must perceive that aspect of the tease as the main goal of the teaser. Apparantly in the examples provided in this study, that failed to occur. Thus, this study does not indicate that teasing is an effective strategy to change another individual's behavior.

The fourth conclusion drawn from this study was that teasing occurs frequently. 50 to 60% of the subjects indicated that they tease others and are teased at least once or more a day.

The present study supports three of the six propositions delineated by Alberts and Hopper (1983). These are: teasing combines agression and play, teasing relies upon ambiguity and teasing is an indirect speech act.

In the open-ended studies, the preponderance of evidence supported the proposition that teasing includes elements of agression and play. Alberts and Hopper (1983) distinguish teasing from kidding and argue that teasing is a combination of play and agression where kidding is purely playful. The present data regarding responses to teasing can be extrapolated to some extent to support this claim. Teasing for purely positive reasons could be loosely classified as "kidding" whereas teasing for negative outcomes could be classified as

Alberts' and Hopper's conceptualization of teasing. However, the proof is only cursory and cannot be generalized because our study did not inquire into the possibility of every day actors distinguishing between kidding and teasing.

A second contention is that teasing relies on ambiguity. Alberts and Hopper state that "teases operate in a context of ambiguity that temporarily mystifies, even decieves the butt of the tease" (Alberts and Hopper, 1983, p. 6). This is evidenced in the present study by the way in which subjects indicated their perceptions of purposes in being teased. Use of qualifying words (e.g., probably, usually) and presequences (e.g., I think) in there explanations indicate that targets of teasing are not completely certain about what is happening.

The third proposition supported in this study is that teasing is an indirect speech act. Alberts and Hopper state that "it functions on two levels - it is at once both a joke and an antagonistic/aggressive statement; its surface meaning and underlying meaning are not identical" (1983, p. 7). This appears most noticeably in compliance gaining teases. One example involved a boyfriend teasing his girlfriend and saying he liked her "cute fat thighs". The literal meaning is that he liked her legs. The underlying meaning contained an indirect request for his girlfriend to reduce the size of her thighs somehow. Single teases often include two or more messages, although at least one is not made explicit.

The present study supports these three propositions from Alberts'and Hopper's conversational teasing investigation. This study approaches teasing from a different perspective than either Alberts and Hopper or Beach and Dunning (1982), who both focus on the conversational tease structure. Results from this exploration offer more information regarding the ways in which "users" of teases develop and respond to them. However, this is only a first step in that direction.

There are many questions about teasing that are left unanswered. Future research should investigate the dimensions that distinguish teasing from other forms of communication acts. That is, do everyday actors distinguish teasing from kidding, as suggested by Alberts and Hopper, and partially supported in this study. Also, teasing needs to be examined in relation to joking to determine if they are separate forms of communication.

Another aspect of teasing which may be examined is to determine the situational aspects that related to frequencies of use of the various purposes and responses of teasing. For instance, is teasing more aggressive in highly competitive situation, or more positive in cooperative contexts?

Dimensions of teasing should be isolated so that individuals' abilities to use teasing as a form of communication can be assessed. Further, these abilities could be related to other communication variables, to determine if people who use teasing often also use other communication skills effectively.

Teasing is a frequently used form of communication which has received little professional study. The results from the present inquiry provide insight into everyday actors' perceptions of teasing, and pave the way for future investigation.

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TABLE 1

Purposes of Teasing Extracted from Open-ended Studies
Frequencies and Percentages

	Study 1		Study 2	
	Initiators*	Targets**	Initiators	Targets
Fun/affection	19 / 76+	11 / 64	13 / 56	15 / 68
Hurt/Ridicule/ Embarrass	3 / 12	1 / 6	2 / 9	3 / 14
Compliance	3 / 12	4 / 24	6 / 26	4 / 18
Revenge			2 / 9	
Jealousy		1 / 6		
TOTAL	25	17	23	22

* Frequencies of respondants describing a teasing episode they initiated.

** Frequencies of respondants describing a teasing episode of which they were the target.

\+ For each entry, the first number represents the frequency of responses, and the second numver represents the perceptage of responses for that type of subject.

TABLE 2

Responses to Teasing Extracted from Open-ended Studies
Frequencies and Percentages

	Study 1		Study 2	
	Initiators	Targets	Initiators	Targets
Positive	12 / 48	3 / 23	14 / 61	10 / 45
NEGATIVE				
Anger	3 / 12	2 / 15	2 / 9	1 / 5
Embarrassment			2 / 9	
Hurt	5 / 20	6 / 46		2 / 10
MULTIPLE				
Hurt, but Hiding It				7 / 31
Negative/ Then Positive	1 / 4	2 / 15	3 / 13	2 / 10
Teaseback	4 / 16		2 / 9	
TOTAL	25	13*	23	22

* Four responses in this category were not able to be classified.

TABLE 3

Goal/Response Pairs from Open-ended Studies
Frequencies and Percentages

	Study 1		Study 2	
	Initiators	Targets	Initiators	Targets
Positive/Positive	14 / 56	4 / 31	15 / 65	10 / 45
Negative/Negative	6 / 24	3 / 23	5 / 22	5 / 23
Positive/Negative	3 / 12	6 / 46	1 / 4	3 / 14
Positive/Multiple Response	2 / 8		2 / 9	4 / 18
TOTALS	25	13*	23	22

* Four responses in this category were not able to be classified.

TABLE 4

Goals of Teasing Reported in Questionnaire
Percentages

	Strongly Agree Agree Slightly Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree
Fun/Affection	90	2	8
(2 items)	96	1	3
Hurt/Ridicule	5	6	89
(2 items)	14	5	81
Compliance Gaining	38	14	48
(2 items)	24	18	58
Avoid Serious	32	13	55
Conversation	33	13	54
(2 items)			
Teaseback	78	8	14
(2 items)	74	12	14

Sample size = 274

TABLE 5

Responses to Teasing Reported in Questionnaires
Percentages

	Always Often	Sometimes	Seldom Never
Laugh/Felt Closer	50	41	9
(2 items)	35	35	30
NEGATIVE			
Hurt	11	48	41
Frustrated	6	37	57
Embarrassed	9	42	49
Defensive	12	40	48
Angry	5	24	71
Compliance/Change	14	46	40
Multiple Outcomes	28	37	35
(2 items)	15	31	54

Sample size = 274

Figure 1

Items from the Teasing Questionnaire

1. I tease others mainly for fun.
2. Usually I tease in a friendly way to show affection.
3. I tease to hurt people.
4. I tease others in order to ridicule them.
5. When I want someone to change what they're doing, I tease them.
6. I can get people to do what I want them to by teasing them.
7. When I am too embarrassed to tell someone how I feel, I tease them.
8. I use teasing to avoid serious conversations.
9. I tease people back when they've teased me.
10. I usually tease someone back when they tease me first.
11. I feel hurt when I've been teased.
12. When people tease me, I get frustrated.
13. Teasing is embarrassing when it happens to me.
14. I get defensive if someone teases me.
15. When someone teases me, I become angry.
16. Teasing makes me laugh.
17. I feel closer to people who tease me than to people who don't.
18. I'll change what I'm doing if I get teased about it.
19. If I get upset when I'm teased, I pretend that I'm not really upset.
20. Teasing usually makes me mad at first, but after a while I get over it.